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**CREIGHTON LACY**

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## About Preaching

This issue of the *Review* is about preaching. In recent years, preaching has been ridiculed, maligned, and dispossessed even by those whose ordination sets them aside for the ministry of word. The prologue of the gospel of John calls the chief actor in all things "The Word," and the great reformers viewed this whole area as absolutely central in the life of the church. Yet preaching has seemed empty and futile for many persons in ministry, and they have hoped for more significant activities such as counseling, education, community action, small groups, etc. These are vital ministries, but they have not yet displaced preaching as an integral part of the life of the Church.

There are many evidences of the enduring power and mystery of preaching and some suggestions that we are now in a renaissance of interest and purpose relative to true preaching. The articles that follow will encourage all those who have anything at all to do with "the word preached and heard" to lift high their expectations for the place of the pulpit in the Christian Church.

Carlyle Marney, who has helped many preachers to discover a dialogical learning—teaching—preaching—being in the community of faith, describes vividly and helpfully "The Fundamentals of Competent Ministry." He suggests that the word "competent" could be changed to "pastoral" or "preaching" (The Fundamentals of Preaching Ministry).

Some new resources for Biblical preaching are related to the ecumenical lectionary—(COCU 1974). Vatican Council II declared that at mass "the treasures of the Bible should be opened up more lavishly so that richer fare might be provided for the faithful at the table of God's word." The development of a new Roman Catholic lectionary beginning in 1970 followed. American Protestants, some of them consulted in the preparation of said lectionary, considered the Roman Catholic Lessons as they revised their own books of worship. There is sufficient unity in the resulting lectionaries of several traditions to allow an inter-denominational publication of aids for interpreting the Lessons of the Church Year. This series of twenty-five books entitled *Proclamation* is reviewed by Lloyd Bailey, and the matter of lectionary preaching is addressed.

The thrust of these articles suggest that homiletics is *not* simply a branch of rhetoric but in fact belongs to the total theological enterprise. The Greek word, *homileein*, means to be in company with. Homiletics at its best and truest is informed and inspired by the interaction of all the disciplines of theological education and is then fleshed out in real life situations in relationships with God and his people.

—John Bergland



# Fundamentals of Competent Ministry

by CARLYLE MARNEY  
*Visiting Professor of Preaching*

When Karl Menninger was putting together his latest book, he asked in a letter if I thought him presumptuous to address a book to clergy. "I want to tell them," he wrote, "that we psychiatrists do not know all the answers and it is no good trying to imitate us with or without fees." Indeed, coming from such a man, there was no presumption, and considerable grace emerges when he did go on to say, "*I do not think they (clergy) realize what power they have at their command to do the very things they want to do. . . .*"

Not since Charles Dickens was giving us such a hard time of it in *Pickwick Papers* have Christian ministers appeared in sorrier plight. *Vis-à-vis* our culture and its institutions of value who hears a truly helpful voice? If our society threshes about like a huge boa, its head in the noose of a trap, if little creatures are crushed in its writhings and if there's none to quiet the beast, is it because (as the Wakefield Master put it, c. 1425) "*are we all hand-tamed by these gentry?*"

I still think not. But it is a presumptuous affair in any culture when one sets out to speak of, to, or for God—much less before so "knowing" a populace as ours. We have always had a hard time of it. Augustine complained of his clergy as "a couple of unpretentious sheep dogs." Charlemagne sent for Alcuin to give ignorant preachers something worth hearing to say. Chaucer has a line on "shitey shepherds and their shitey sheep." Jonathan Swift flailed out at the Scottish Divines as delivering "oracular belches to . . . panting disciples." Yet, that Charles Dickens version of Methodist preachers: *unctuous, mewling, greedy*; across 150 years it stings!

Now educators, physicians, lawyers are, by and large, in as bad a case, except that budgets and fees allow them the dubious advantage of more self-respect (or self-deception!). What seems missing? Are we all "hand-tamed by these gentry"?

Neither education, nor opportunity, nor courage is lacking, really. Rather, most everywhere, we clergy have low self-esteem; hence we lose what we had to say, and the pasture in which to say it! Dr. Menninger tells us that we must not fear to be reproachful.

He asks us to make like Jeremiah, Amos, Micah, and John the Baptist.

Now all of us know that the nerve to be reproachful will never make possible a ministry. A broader base than that negative gift is required—but I answered Dr. Menninger by saying that an inordinately high percentage of the clergy we see at Interpreters' House do not have enough sense of "I," worth, integrity, ego maturity to damn a church-mouse, much less an entire culture. So we start there.

Christianly, we have more to say to, for, with, on account of, and in behalf of Man than from any other stance we could take: *if* we have done our home-work and *if* we have enough ego-strength to say *I*. By home-work I mean that decades-long process of inquiry, hat in hand, begun long years before seminary, continued forever after, addressed to competent psychology, psychiatry, sociology, history, drama, art, daily affairs, interpreted by a growing Biblical memory, contemporary experience, theological acumen, into some kind of understanding of our Christian Advantage: we really do know about *Man*; and, we really have been shown the way to an Ultimate Earth. But where on such a venture does one start?

The noted Jesuit, Gustav Weigel, in public exchange with Paul Tillich, told of an Italian peasaut who asked how long it would take to make his son a priest: "It depends, nine years if Benedictine; twelve years if Dominican; but if he wants to be a Jesuit like myself, 'twould take fifteen years!" And the old man replied, "Well, Father, I suspect my son had best be a Jesuit, he *is* a little slow!" So are we all—slow—and no seminary on earth can do in three years or six years or fifteen what it takes to make competent a ministry of the Gospel of God; but—competency for ministry can be grasped at there, the quest can focus itself there, tools and skills can be gotten there, resources for the long haul can be identified there, friends and heroes for the journey, with bread, can come together there. This, for me, is what seminary is about. I have learned to work with certain fundamentals always in view.

## I

My seminary seemed to aim at making me able "to tell." I needed all six years of it and am grateful, but I had to come at my inability "to hear" another way. No one can tell until he can hear, and who can hear except as he is heard? This is why the first fundament of any life that is dialogical in form must come to terms with *the shadow side of new-being*. It is an axiom of ministry:

called to bless, *no one can bless any other until he-she can bless his-her own origins*; and, no one can bless who has not also the power to damn. The *I* must be able to say *yes* and *no*, but it must be able to say *yes* to its sources. Hence, somewhere, sometimes, someone must rub my nose in the motives that moved me to seek high calling, else I am never house broken and continue to soil the temple I set out to serve.

This "shadow-side" is all of me that is not visible of or to me. Neither good nor bad, it is just *there* with unorchestrated voices, unnamed terrors, unrecognized dominions all its own. My cellar, darker and danker than I knew, is not really ventilated by my attempts to baptize and/or circumcize the primal powers that push little *Id* to make me serve the self. In religion's holy name I overlay these images with the material of piety as my culture and region afford, but discover I do not really face these primals of *original sin* alone. Some thou, some other, must mid-wife me on this labor. It is a journey to depth, never completed, always dangerous, and the door to my redemption even as it is door to my "private church." To fish out that cistern, label its old skeletons and carcasses of primal powers: infantile lust, rapine, and greed—this *is* humanum.

And, one can drown there, in the very waters of new-birth, unless the *I* begins to see early an *original salvation*: To wit, *from wherever I started I was loved or I would not have been kept!*

"Yea, strangling in your own after-birth, I . . . bade you live . . . tended you like an evergreen. . . .

Ezek. 16:6, 7

There was for any *I* some significant *other*.

From here *I* can begin to make peace: with the culture that spawned me, with the parents who shaped and mis-shaped me; with the institutions that provincialized, distorted, and preserved my values. From here the *I* can go through home again. *I* can accept and bless the stuff God had at his disposal for making me. *I* realize that somewhere on my road, with some other, *I* did become a new creation—lust began to become *love*, rapine became *communion*, hate turned to *concern*, and greed began to rest content. As Otis Rice taught me thirty-five years ago, the *I* is never really shocked now; *I* have been inside. Never really ineligible now, *I* have substitutes to priest those who still threaten me. In Oman's words, I know God has other messengers. I no longer have to bless them all. I am no more the universal mother. My omnipotence bubble has sprung a permanent leak. I have become to myself a